

## **The List, continued by pathvain aelien**

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**Summary:** Eleven still keeps a list.

## The List, continued

A/N: It would probably be helpful if you've read the original before reading this one. Huge thanks to AliKattt for the awesome suggestions, and iron for wanting a sequel.

Eleven still keeps a list.

She no longer needs it as reminder that she'll see them all again, or to keep her friends close, because she sees at least one of them every day. And she's currently wedged in between Dustin and Mike on the couch, so they're actually *very* close. Literally. Her left foot has that tingly numb feeling because she hasn't been able to move it for a long time. It's *asleep*. The couch only *comfortably* fits two people. It fits five people very uncomfortably, but no one wants to sit on the floor. That's okay with Eleven. Or it was, about an hour ago when the movie started. But now her foot is a little dead and Dustin is sitting almost backward next to her, squinting at the TV with his neck swiveled. He looks like an owl. But owls don't mind swiveling to look at things, and Dustin minds. A lot. She can tell because he's muttering a lot of interesting words. Lucas reaches around (and over) Will, almost crushing him into a cushion, to swat Dustin. It doesn't make the cursing stop. If anything, it gets worse.

Eleven carefully extricates herself from the couch and gingerly steps on her sleepy foot, gradually exerting pressure until it feels normal. Mike glances up at her and smiles. He starts to get up, too, but she shakes her head. She's coming right back. She just needs to get a drink. And a chair. The open space on the couch has been swallowed by her friends. Eleven observes them quietly, happily, for a few seconds. Her friends. The most important people on her list.

She's still thinking of her list when she pours a drink of water. She hasn't looked at it in a long time, and it's in need of revision. While the list isn't actually necessary anymore, somehow it is. It still comforts her. It tells her that things will never go back to the way they were. The list means that she's home now. And she knows what home is. Home is all of the people on her list, and being able to see them whenever she wants. In fact, she can see four of them right now. They're still tangled up in front of the TV. She likes spending

time with her friends, and watching movies, but she's lost interest in this one. There are a lot of explosions. Even though that sounds exciting, it actually isn't. What she actually wants to do is look at her list. Maybe they won't notice? They really like the explosions. She can tell because every time there's a loud noise, they jump and drop popcorn on the floor. Maybe that's why no one wants to sit on the floor, actually. Hopper doesn't clean very often. Eleven is pretty sure there's still popcorn (and one slice of pepperoni) on the floor from the last time they were over. Eleven brightens. She needs a chair, which is in her room. Where her list is.

She doesn't have to keep the list in her head anymore, because she has plenty of paper. She can make a hundred lists if she wants to. *More*. Which is good, because each version of the list is more convoluted than the last. *This* version of the list is more worn than the original, which is funny because now whole days go by without her even glancing at it. And she hasn't revised it in almost a month. She glances back toward the living room, but things are still exploding and people are screaming so she has some time.

She doesn't intend to do more than glance at it, but that isn't what happens. Half an hour later she is looking down at her list and tapping her pencil. She's learned that it's very important to write the list in pencil. Even now. Using a pencil means she can erase if necessary, and she's doing a lot of erasing right now. This version of her list is already more battered than the original because it was harder to make, which is also funny. Now that she knows everyone better, it should be easier. But it isn't.

Eleven is, in her own way, a very careful thinker. She has to be, considering all she's been through. And everything she may face, in the future. She has to be prepared, always. She can never let her guard down. Not completely. It's okay, though. She's used to it. And sometimes it's nice. It makes things easier, with even the most mundane of circumstances. Like right now, puzzling out her list.

She knows now that other people don't keep lists. She suspected as much before, but now she's sure. But that's okay. It doesn't give her the lonely Eleven feeling, not anymore. She knows it's okay to keep a list. The names still make her happy. While she gets the lonely Eleven feeling less and less, it still happens. But it doesn't last long, because

she can call one of her friends. And even better, when she's with her friends, she can almost forget the feeling. Like it never happened. And that's more powerful than any special ability she possesses. It makes it easier to work on her list, no matter how complicated it gets. And how hard she has to think. And Eleven is a very careful thinker. She thinks very hard about her list, because the people on it are worth the effort. Sometimes, when she revisits her memories, she makes revisions. She scratches out the names, and rewrites them. And while it's confusing, it could be worse.

One name always stays in place.

Joyce is now 6th on her list. Joyce is almost her mother. *Almost*. When Joyce hugs her, she feels safe. Protected. She would be lucky to have Joyce as a mother. And the feeling is reciprocated, which is wonderful. She knows how Joyce feels about her. She knows that Joyce would like to give her a home, if she didn't already have one with Hopper. Joyce would like to be her mother. Since she can't be that, she's a friend. An adult friend. Joyce taught her about makeup and that it's okay to not wear makeup, too. She can tell Joyce anything, and Joyce always listens. She understands. Joyce is always on her side, no matter what. It's the same way she treats her own children, and Eleven is grateful for that. Will and Jonathan deserve someone like Joyce, and she deserves children like them. They aren't a perfect family, but they are the closest Eleven has ever seen.

Joyce also makes Hopper a little less cranky, which is almost a miracle, but it's not the reason for her inclusion on the list. Although she has a mother, she also doesn't. She'll never have a real mother to teach her about makeup, so Joyce will have to do.

Joyce and Hopper have switched places on her list, which means that Hopper is 5th. That doesn't mean she likes Joyce any less; it just means that Hopper is Hopper. Almost her dad. *Legally* her dad, because she has a *birth certificate* now. Hopper is sometimes cranky (more than sometimes) but it's just part of who he is. Like Dustin and his jokes. He's still kind. He took her in when he didn't have to, and gave her a home. She didn't always appreciate that, when she had to stay away from her friends, but she appreciates it now. Especially since her friends can come over whenever they want. It's funny. They have a strange relationship, but it works for them. They each need

something from the other, something they can't have otherwise. Eleven needs a father. And Hopper needs a daughter.

They need each other, because they are family. It's not perfect, but she's learned that families aren't perfect. All that matters is that you love that person, and they love you, and you look after each other. You keep each other safe.

That's what she has with Hopper, which is why Hopper and Joyce have switched places.

This list is longer than her last one. It's because there are so many new names on this version. That should make her happy, because each name makes her happy. Except for one. One name gives her so many emotions that she can't even recognize them all. Sadness. Regret. Love. Happiness. Those are the strongest emotions, and they're all mixed in together until she doesn't quite know how to feel.

Her mother is 9th on her list. She is almost tied with her aunt, who is 10th. Although she's spent more time with Becky, it doesn't seem right to put her above her own mother.

She loves her mother very, very much.

They've never spoken, but they have. They've connected mentally, and that's more powerful than the normal type of speech. But it was only once, and it won't happen again. Her mother is still alive, but she is also gone. And she can't come back. Eleven knows that it doesn't help to wonder how things might have been, if only her mother had never met Papa. But she can't help it. She can't help imagining a world where she would have been Jane, and not Eleven.

She doesn't blame her mother. The opposite. Her mother is a hero. She must be, because she held onto something, the last part of herself, for so many years, in case they ever found each other again. She waited to pass on a message, and the truth of her past, and Eleven knows how much effort that cost her.

She will never really know her mother, but she knows something. The most important thing. Her mother loves her more than anything in the world. She gave Eleven two important things, the only things

she'll ever be able to give her. The truth. And a sister.

Kali is also on her list.

She has mixed feelings about Kali. Kali is family. She's a sister, and sisters are something to treasure. They may not actually be related, but they share a history. A childhood. And powers that no one else has. She wanted to meet her sister so, so badly. Which is why she found her in Chicago. And she loves Kali. Kali was kind to her, and tried to help her become stronger.

*But.*

Deep down inside her mind, she knows Kali isn't a very good person. Not anymore. Eleven doesn't blame her for that, not at all. But it does make it difficult to sort out her feelings about Kali. Kali kills people. And not because of *self-defense*. For revenge. They are bad people, but that doesn't mean they deserve to die. Eleven knows that. But Eleven doesn't blame her. She can't. Kali is the person *she* would have been, without Mike.

And that's why Kali is on her list, but 14th, much further down than the rest of her friends.

Kali is her sister, even though they aren't related. But Eleven does share a blood tie with someone besides her mother. The 10th person on her list is another link to her mother. She is family. Not just in the legal sense, or because they love each other, but because they are related. Because they look alike, at least a little. She's still getting to know her aunt Becky, but she likes her a lot. She likes to spend time with her, and learn about her mother. And she likes her for her own sake, too. Becky is tough and smart and funny. She can adapt to anything. When her mother went away, Becky took care of her. Even though she didn't believe her. And when she learned the truth of what happened, that didn't faze her, either. She just accepted it, and welcomed Eleven into her home.

When she's with her aunt, she can sometimes get a glimpse of that other life. The almost life. It makes her sad but it's also nice. It's nice to have family, real family, and another home. She knows Becky would be happy to have her always, but that can't happen. That

wouldn't be safe for either of them. And she would be too far away from everyone else she loves. But once or twice a week, she stays there. With Becky and her mother and the life she almost had. Her Jane life. Not on the weekends, though. The weekends are for her friends.

And their siblings.

Jonathan is 8th on her list. She likes him a lot. Jonathan is patient. He doesn't mind spending hours showing her how to do things like cooking, or playing her music. He just likes to *teach*. And he never gets frustrated. He has the same type of quiet patience Will has. Mike is also patient, but she's noticed that he only has that endless patience with her. Jonathan is different, he's patient with *everyone*. He makes Nancy happy, but more than that, he makes *Will* happy. Jonathan is one of the few people Will can feel completely comfortable with, and she knows it. And Jonathan would do anything to keep his little brother safe. More than safe. Happy. He isn't *her* brother, but he is *a* brother. And that earns him the 8th place on her list.

Nancy is still on her list. She earned her place a long time ago, for many reasons. But one reason is more important than the others. Nancy is almost her sister. And, unlike Kali, Nancy is a good person. A great person. Eleven loves to spend time with Nancy. Nancy already has a little sister, but she doesn't mind having another one. Eleven knows this for a fact, because Nancy told her. Although they don't live in the same house, that's the way Nancy has always made her feel. Nancy is the one who first showed her what home could be like, what *normal* could be, and that gave her hope. But more than that, she's Mike's sister. She cares about him. And Nancy understood what he went through, every day for 353 days. She tried to help him in every way she could.

And that's why Nancy is 7th on her list.

Steve is 12th on her list. She hasn't spent much time with him, but she likes him a lot. He's funny and brave and he may grumble a lot, but he'll always try to help. He's a little like Lucas, in that way. And Hopper. And Steve has become one of Dustin's best friends, almost like a brother. Dustin has a lot of friends, but he clearly needed someone like Steve. Dustin has always been a naturally cheerful

person, but sometimes that cheer is a little forced. Fragile. At least when it comes to certain things, like *dates*. But Dustin is genuinely happy now, almost all the time. And that's because of Steve. Steve's given him confidence. Even Eleven can see it. It makes her so grateful, that *her* friend has a friend like that.

Mr. Clarke is 11th on her list, which is a very special number. The number deserves to be on her list, and only a very special person can occupy it, which makes it a perfect spot for Mr. Clarke. He's like her friends. In fact, she thinks that her friends will be just like him when they are older. And she knows that he is good. It's obvious to anyone. He has always been there for them, even when it was late at night and he wasn't actually teaching. He doesn't mind if you call him at home if you need help, because he is more than a teacher. Somewhere in between a friend and a parent. Although he's similar to all of her friends, Eleven thinks Mr. Clarke is most like Mike. It's something she sensed before, and now she knows it for sure. He is accepting. He knows the truth about her and he isn't afraid, it's just a fact to him. She is Eleven and that's okay with him. He makes it seem normal. Just like Mike does. And always has. Although it's difficult to imagine Mr. Clarke at her age, she has no problem visualizing this: If he had found someone like her in the woods, he would have brought her home. Just like Mike. He bought her a bike, and he didn't have to. He did it just because of his goodness. That Mike goodness. To her friends, he is a hero. He's an adult, and a teacher, but also so much more than that. He would do anything to help them.

He would also do anything to help *her*, which makes him her hero, too. She can trust him with her secret, and that's why Mr. Clarke is on her list.

Mike's mom is still on her list. And she's still higher than Mike's dad. She is 21st. Although things didn't go as planned, Mike's mom could have been her mom. And Mike's mom is always kind. She doesn't know her secret, but she does know one thing about Eleven. Mrs. Wheeler knows she likes lasagna, and she makes it whenever she comes over. When she came over three times in one week, Karen made lasagna *every single time*. Even Mike rolled his eyes the third time, but it was nice. And she really, really likes lasagna. Not as much as she likes Eggos, but she knows that Eggos are for breakfast



and lasagna is for dinner. Although Mike's mom didn't give her a home, Eleven is always welcome into hers.

Mike's dad is last on her list, but he's still included at number 22. She still doesn't know him very well, because she's usually in the basement when she's at Mike's. And Mr. Wheeler is either at work, or in his chair. Sometimes he's awake and sometimes he's asleep, but that's usually the place to find him. And he doesn't talk much, although he's not unkind. Maybe he's like her, and he just doesn't have the words. Or maybe it's because everyone else is always already talking. Either way, he's usually quiet. She just doesn't know him very well. She only knows a few things about him, besides the fact that he's Mike's dad. He works hard, and he likes to relax. He's happy just being by himself. He remembers that she likes Eggos, and buys them whenever he's at the store. He likes to watch TV but sometimes he gives her the remote and lets her pick the show. It's a responsibility that she takes very seriously, and she tries to find something everyone would like.

The last and most important thing that she knows about Mike's dad is that he is not like Papa. And that would earn anyone a place on the list.

She hasn't forgotten about Max. She still feels a little ashamed when she thinks about how she treated her before. She apologized but Max just shrugged and told her not to worry about it. Eleven was embarrassed and had to admit to pushing her with her power, but Max just laughed and told her not to worry about *that*, either. And she tries not to, but it's hard. Sometimes it's harder to forgive yourself, even when you've been forgiven by someone else. It's funny, in the not funny way.

So she tries not to think about it, but she immediately adds Max to her list. Max definitely deserves a place on her list. She's 13th because, while she likes Max a lot, they haven't spent much time together yet. At least not without everyone else around. And they don't have much in common, except for being the only girls in a group of guys. Max is tough and always says exactly whatever she's thinking. Eleven admires this quality but doesn't share it. She's too used to keeping her thoughts to herself. Max doesn't have the patience of some of the rest of her friends, but she's a lot of fun and

sometimes it's just nice to have another girl around. And Max feels the same way, although Eleven isn't aware of it. Max knows how different they are and while they'll probably never be best friends, she recognizes Eleven's strength. They have that in common.

Dustin's mom is 15th on her list, which is surprising but also not. Eleven can't help loving the people who love her friends, and Claudia loves her son a lot. And Claudia is a lot of fun, just like Dustin. And helpful. She took the kittens to the kitten doctor because they needed *vaccinations*. And she invites Eleven (and the kittens) over all the time. Dustin muttered under his breath that this is because his mother *is a cat lady*, but Eleven knows better. Claudia likes *her*, not just the kittens. Although she does like them a lot, too. Claudia told her *Dustin is lucky to have a friend like you*, which startled her. She never considered that before, just that she is lucky to have *them*. Claudia is kind, just like her son. And when she sees them together, she can see how Dustin became *Dustin*. Their relationship and similarity interests her a lot. Dustin is like his mother, and Will and Jonathan are like Joyce, and Mike and Nancy are *nothing* like their parents. She doesn't understand how that can be, but it's interesting.

Thinking of Claudia naturally leads to her kittens. The next few spots on her list are reserved for her feline friends, because she doesn't mind being a cat lady, too. Although they aren't people, they are in her heart. Her own kittens and Tews are 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th on her list. It's easy to fix Tews in place, because Tews isn't hers. Tews always sits on her lap when she's over at Dustin's, but Tews isn't her *own* cat. That's why Tews is 20th on her list. It's harder to allocate numbers to her kittens. It's hard to even place them so far down on the list, because in her heart they are a lot higher. She loves them for their own sake, because they make her happy, and because they are hers. For the first time in her life, she has someone-or *something*-to take care of. And each one of them is her favorite, in their own way. Although they are named after her friends, they aren't much like them. Will is very quiet and shy, and his kitten isn't like that at all. In personality, Cleric takes after Hopper a lot more than he takes after Will. He's sometimes cranky, especially when someone else takes his toys. He doesn't like to share, and that isn't like Will *at all*. But Cleric is playful and fun to watch. He usually gets so excited with his toys that he knocks things over, and then he gets excited by *that*, and

knocks even more things over until Hopper sighs and leaves the room. Dustin says watching him is more entertaining than most of *the crap* on TV, and Lucas rolls his eyes, but he's right.

All of her kittens are wonderful. It doesn't seem right to love one more than the others, so while they occupy numbers 16th-19th on her list, she just writes *the kittens* on each line.

Eleven hasn't yet learned that it's okay to feel that way about her friends, too. Someday, she might, and she won't have to keep a list anymore.

Will is second on her list, which makes her happy. She somehow knew he would become that important to her. They are connected. She has that magnet feeling with him, at least a little. It lets her know him. And it lets him know her. She can feel him. Will can hear her even when she doesn't speak, not with her mouth, anyway. He can do this, because he is a little bit like her now. Sometimes his mouth doesn't work. He has felt the darkness, too. It makes her sad for him but it means they can help each other. She can be quiet with Will. She doesn't have to struggle to keep a conversation going, or miss out on half of the conversations because she doesn't understand what they're talking about unless Mike is there to explain it. Although Dustin and Lucas are getting better at it, speaking her language. And teaching her theirs. They are learning. But Will is different. More like Mike. Will's never needed to learn. It's just instinct, from the moment they met. Officially. Out of all her friends, Will understands her second best. And she understands him, too.

And that's why Will is second on her list.

Dustin is third *and* second on her list. It's bewildering but that's the way it is. He's third because Will is already second, so he can't really be second *also*, can he? But Dustin is still somehow second, because she likes him a lot. He's funny and helpful. Sometimes he's a little more interfering than helpful but that makes her laugh, too. He's a good friend. And he always makes her laugh. She doesn't always understand the jokes, but she's learning. And she knows him. He makes so many jokes because he just wants other people to be as happy as he is. That makes him special.

And he's kind. Maybe some people can't see it, because he's always teasing. But she sees more than most people do. It's a skill she's honed out of necessity. She's never had any trouble seeing his kindness. He's a lot more patient than Lucas (and sometimes more patient than Mike, unless it involves her. Mike is always patient with her). He never makes her feel different. He accepted her from the very beginning and that hasn't changed. *He* hasn't changed, which earns her admiration. They've all been through something terrible, but he's adapted the most easily, out of all of them. It hasn't changed him, the good person that he is. The person that taught her about friendship. He likes to joke and tease his friends, but she can trust him. She can tell him anything, and the secret will be safe with him. And he can confide in her. That's true friendship, and she's so grateful for that. She is grateful for *him*.

But Will is already second, so that makes Dustin third on her list. Almost.

Trying to place Dustin somewhere permanent only muddles the list even more. It means that Lucas is third and fourth on her list. It's exasperating but she doesn't know what to do about it. Lucas is fourth because Dustin is third. But if Dustin is *also* second, doesn't that make *Lucas* third?

Lucas is third because it doesn't seem right to put him in fourth. Fourth is very far from first, especially for one of her best friends. And she's a lot closer to him than she used to be. When Lucas spends a rainy afternoon, just with her, reading comics aloud and teaching her board games, he moves all the way up to second. But the next day, Dustin brings Tews over for a cat *play-date* and makes her laugh and he reclaims his place as third. Almost second. And that makes her erase and rewrite the list until the paper tears from frustrated scribbling, but it does make things go back to normal.

Normal for her.

She can't ignore what's right in front of her. Dustin is third (and second), which makes Lucas fourth (and third). It makes her head hurt, and she puts the list aside for a little while. But she's so frustrated she forgets to put it away. Its usual spot is in her notebook, because even her list needs a home. But she forgets. Instead, she

leaves it on her desk. Where it remains until the next time her friends are over.

Dustin picks it up inquisitively. He doesn't think it's rude, because it's not exactly like he was going through her things, right? It was right on the desk, out in the open. When he realizes what he's holding, he's even more curious. They all know about the list, but none of them have been fortunate enough to catch a glimpse. Until now. And he can't help feeling just the tiniest bit gleeful. He engages in a short but heroic internal struggle with himself.

*Put it back on the desk.*

*But someone else is going to see it, anyway! Why can't it be me?*

*It would upset her. Put it back.*

And he does. Well, almost. He comes really, really close. That counts, doesn't it? But then he catches sight of something and loses his resolve.

"You're only number *four*," Dustin says, delighting in that salient fact.

"Four? What are you talking about?" Lucas doesn't know what Dustin is gloating about, but he's already rankled. Dustin glances toward the rest of the group, but they haven't noticed anything amiss. They're attempting to extricate Bard from the closet, without any noticeable success. The kittens have fleas. Eleven spotted them in Paladin's fur and matter-of-factly told Hopper that they were the reason her cats had been so itchy. Hopper took one look at the jumping black dots and barricaded the kittens in the bathroom before calling Mike.

His *gift*, his *fleas*.

The other three kittens have already been bathed, but Bard scratched the hell out of Will and ran for the safety of Eleven's closet. Dustin's never been so grateful for a diversion. He holds tightly to the list, but tilts it so Lucas can scan it. He does.

Lucas sees that he is fourth on her list.

"FOUR?" Lucas exclaims. He doesn't care where the rest of his friends

are placed, except for Dustin. Because Dustin is the only one that will gloat over it. Dustin is just above him. Lucas rolls his eyes at his friend because he doesn't miss the gratified look on his face. Dustin's apparently under the impression that he's been awarded a very high honor. Possibly right up there with a purple heart. Lucas snickers. Only Dustin would be thrilled with coming in third. He's amused but feigns indignation. "El, I took on the Demogorgon for you. I think that rates me third at the very least."

Mike looks at him, already angry, but Eleven hasn't really registered the question yet. She's preoccupied with her kitten. Bard is hiding behind her shoe and pretending to be invisible. She's trying to reason with him mentally but it's not working. *Water is bad, and that is that.* He swats at her when she attempts to pull him toward her. Which is why her response to Lucas is automatic and completely honest. "You *were* third. Before," she adds vaguely.

When Mike jumps to his feet, it startles Bard. It startles her, too. She finally tunes in to the topic at hand. They are looking at her list. And Lucas is unhappy with her, because he is only fourth. *Oh no.* The lonely Eleven feeling is suddenly strangling her and eye-speak is the only way she can communicate, because her mouth isn't working anymore.

But it's okay. He looks at the list, and he looks at her, and even Lucas can read her eyes this time. "Just kidding," he says quickly, a little alarmed at the look on her face. "Fourth is pretty good."

"I wouldn't know, I'm third," Dustin murmurs, before holding up his hands in apology. Mike lunges for him but Will is closer and gets there first. "Asshole," Mike snarls, as Will snatches the sheet of paper back from Dustin. He hands it to Eleven without looking at it, because of *privacy*. It's another reason Will is second on her list. Eleven thanks him quietly but she's still watching Lucas cautiously. When he grins at her, the tightness in her chest eases. It's sometimes difficult to understand her friends. Especially when they're teasing. Lucas is the hardest to understand, but she doesn't have any trouble this time. She sees he's only joking. He's happy. He doesn't mind being fourth, because he's smart. He knows that fourth is still very high on her list.

Lucas *is* happy to be on her list, to be someone that she trusts. Especially considering the way their relationship began. Even though it's in the past and she's forgiven him, he hasn't forgiven himself. Not yet. He doesn't care where his name falls on the list, just that it's included. In fact, maybe it's even better that he's one below Dustin. It means that *Dustin* will be the one to catch Bard and give him a flea bath, because he owes Eleven an apology. And she forgives him, because that's what friends do. They make mistakes sometimes, but it doesn't matter, because they love you. They love *her*. And she loves them.

She tucks the list back into its home, because it's complete.

That is her list, for now, at least. And confusing as it may be.

In time she hopes to add more names, even if it becomes harder to keep up with, and the names will probably move. A lot. But it's okay. They don't have to stay fixed in place, because they will always be on her list. Somewhere. This list was more difficult to create, not just because she loves all of her friends so much. She knows so many people now that not all of them make it onto her list. It's just not possible. They are people she likes, but not enough to earn them a coveted spot on the list.

She feels so, so lucky to have that many people in her life. It's funny. She always thought there would be just two kinds of people in her life. The people on her list. And the opposite. The people she hates, like Troy. But it's not like that. She's discovering whole new categories of people and it's often perplexing but always wonderful. She was happy to have eleven people on her list, before. Eleven seemed like a lot. But she has a lot more than eleven now, and she's even happier. She knows that even if she never adds another name, she will be happy. She knows how lucky she is. She will be happy for the rest of her life if she can only have the people on this list.

She no longer needs to look at her list, although she still likes to. Sometimes. Most of the time she's too busy *being* with the people on her list to look at their name on a piece of paper. She no longer keeps the list in her pocket, because, while it is still special, she doesn't need to keep the list close anymore. It doesn't keep her friends close, because she can call them whenever she wants to. And they are

always in her heart, on some type of internal list. You can't see it, but all of their names are written there.

This list is even more worn than the last one, but only because there are so many people on it. That's okay. She can always make a new list. She can make a hundred new lists, until the day comes when she doesn't need to keep a list anymore. And she may have to, because the names move. *A lot.*

Maybe it would be better to say that *everyone* is tied for second. That would make it easier, considering how often the names move. Most of the names, anyway. One name doesn't. It's fixed in place. And it will never move.

Mike is always first.